

VZCZCXRO9722
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO
DE RUEHGO #0395/01 1770732
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 260732Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9164
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2099
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5573
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 9169
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6747
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4556
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2550
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000395

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, IO, AND CA/OCS/ACS/EAP; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2019

TAGS: [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA STATE MEDIA HIGHLIGHT AN ALLEGED USG-YETTAW CONNECTION

REF: RANGOON 390

Classified By: Political Officer Sean K. O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

1. (C) State media carried extensive coverage of Police Chief Khin Yi's June 25 press conference regarding American Citizen John Yettaw (reftel) and highlighted Khin Yi's implication of USG involvement. The regime-mouthpiece New Light of Myanmar's headline noted that police forces arrested Yettaw "about 30 yards from the residence of the Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy." Opposition contacts interpret the press conference and media articles as an effort to shift focus from Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) to Yettaw and the United States. However, they surmise that this is not intended to ease regime pressure on ASSK, whom they believe will still be convicted. We comment that, while ASSK's conviction is the most obvious outcome, recent machinations cause one to wonder if the regime is keeping options open, maybe with the proposed UN SYG visit in mind. End Summary.

Extensive Coverage in State Media - Link to USG

2. (U) The regime-mouthpiece New Light of Myanmar newspaper (in both the Burmese and English versions) carried the full, multi-page transcript of Police Chief Khin Yi's June 25 press conference regarding American Citizen John Yettaw. The large-print, top of back page headline reads: "There must be a strong reason why such a sick person chose a long way instead of a short, safe way he had used three times; Mr Yettaw was arrested in the water of Inya Lake on 6 May morning, about 30 yards from the residence of the Charge d'Affaires of the U.S. Embassy." Given that the remarks about where police captured Yettaw were a tiny portion of a lengthy discourse and that non-official media did not initially focus on the alleged USG link, the headline is striking. State television also provided extensive coverage, with both evening broadcasts of Burmese news devoting approximately 30 minutes to the briefing with accompanying images of the audience and displays of "evidence" against

Yettaw.

Opposition Reaction

13. (C) Opposition lawyer U Aung Thein noted that this was the first time the regime clearly focused on Yettaw rather than ASSK. He believed the regime intended the press conference to convey its suspicion of and displeasure with the USG and our Burma policy. However, Aung Thein does not think this shift in focus will help ASSK. He stressed that Khin Yi's presentation clearly accused ASSK of failing to cooperate with the authorities. Aung Thein also noted that the display of "evidence" at the briefing included plates ASSK used to feed Yettaw and a Book of Mormon the regime said ASSK failed to turn over promptly to the police (allegedly evidence of violations of her house arrest and Burmese law).

14. (C) Arakan League for Democracy Joint Secretary and 1990 MP-elect Aye Thar Aung echoed those thoughts and speculated that the regime may be attempting to divert international attention away from its treatment of ASSK and toward "American citizen John Yettaw," and by implication the USG. Aye Thar Aung did not think ASSK's situation or the outcome of the trial will change as a result. Aye Thar Aung added that he believes the GOB sees only two options regarding ASSK: convict her and face international pressure or release her and face domestic political pressure from a reinvigorated NLD. Given the choice, Aye Thar Aung expects the GOB will choose to "face the music with the world" and keep ASSK out

RANGOON 00000395 002 OF 002

of circulation until after 2010.

Comment

15. (C) The perspective of the two opposition figures is certainly the conventional wisdom about how the ASSK trial will resolve. Less likely, though still a possibility, is that the regime is setting up an unexpected outcome. There is no easy explanation for why a regime intent on convicting ASSK would have suddenly slowed the trial process a few weeks ago. Similarly, yesterday's briefing that, without clear explanation, focused the spotlight on Yettaw, calling him the "key player" and alleging USG connections, has no single, easy explanation. With the UN SYG's Special Representative Gambari now in Nay Pyi Taw scouting what a SYG visit could achieve, it remains possible that Senior General Than Shwe is keeping some sort of ASSK-related option as a potential deliverable. We would be surprised by a full and unconditional release from detention, given the looming 2010 elections, though any release now could always be followed by a renewed "protective custody" later.

16. (C) The reinvigorated targeting of the "USG connection" is curious. In the first days after Yettaw's arrest, authorities put out stories that attempted to build a case of U.S. involvement; but it seemed almost nobody bought in. Perhaps we are too close to Inya Lake to see clearly, but the "why" of the latest attempted Embassy linkage escapes us.
DINGER